



Basic income and the social investment state: towards mutual reinforcement?

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Abstract:	<p>Is a social investment strategy compatible with the provision of an unconditional basic income? <i>Prima facie</i>, these two scenarios look like incongruent policy alternatives. While social investment – an influential policy paradigm at the level of the European Union – aims at promoting public services and maximum labor market participation, basic income is paid in cash and has sometimes been presented as the key component of a post-work future. In this article, we explore this apparent incongruence and show that these two visions for welfare reform are not necessarily incompatible. We argue that they may share a number of substantial points of agreement, and indeed may reinforce one another according to a logic of institutional complementarity. In particular, we claim that a partial basic income (i.e. a modest unconditional income guarantee whose amount would not be sufficient to live on if one lives alone) could enhance or complement the key functions of a social-democratic version of the social investment strategy. By doing so, we conclude, the integration of a basic income into a social investment package could contribute to overcoming criticisms of the social investment agenda. And, at the same time, it could rescue basic income from the numerous critics who see it as an unrealistic policy proposal.</p>

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1. Introduction

In academic as well as in political circles, two alternative scenarios for the future of social protection have gained increasing visibility in the last decade or so. On the one hand, proponents of a ‘social investment’ (SI) strategy argue that the emergence of ‘new social risks’ – essentially due to the shift to a knowledge-based economy, as well as societal shifts such as population ageing, a rise in female employment and a decline in fertility rates, growing family instability and the emergence of a crisis of care – require a new policy mix, involving the expansion of ‘capacitating’ services, investment in human capital, support for life course transitions, and the empowerment of individuals to participate fruitfully in the labour market (Hemerijck, 2017; Morel et al., 2012a, 2012b).

On the other hand, proponents of a ‘basic income’ (BI) insist on the importance of preserving and enhancing individuals’ “real freedom”, even when they choose to stay outside the labour market, by providing an income floor to all regardless of prior contribution and absent behavioural conditions (Van Parijs, 1995; Van Paris and Vanderborght, 2017).

SI has had significant influence over policy development, especially in the context of the European Union (EU), and can be considered a welfare policy paradigm, in terms of infusing policy makers’ worldviews with a set of rules about what works and what does not (Hemerijck, 2015, 2017, 2018). Crucially, it is not prescriptive of a specific set of policies *per se*, and has the attributes of a container concept. Similarly, although BI has clear definitional attributes, it comes in several versions, coheres with a number of contrasting ideological perspectives, and may be integrated into existing welfare systems in a variety of ways. Thus, both SI and BI are nebulous concepts in terms of their implications for the welfare state. BI has been growing in popularity for a number of years and now attracts serious attention as a solution to labour

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3 market dualization, automation, and the impact of the COVID-19 crisis (Nettle et al., 2021).
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5 However, it has had relatively little influence over policy development, with investment of
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7 political capital limited to commitments to experimental trials.
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10 Until now, discourses around SI and BI have proceeded largely in isolation from one another.
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12 And when the ideas do collide, however briefly, this frequently results in distrust and
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14 scepticism. From the perspective of BI scholarship, SI is rarely mentioned; for example, it is
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16 not discussed at all in Standing (2017, 2020), Van Parijs and Vanderborcht (2017), Torry
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18 (2018) or Haagh (2019). For their part, the most influential proponents of the SI paradigm are
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20 rather scathing about BI (e.g. Palier, 2016, 2017, 2019).
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25 *Prima facie* their contrasting features create an impression that the two scenarios are highly
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27 incongruent policy *alternatives*. The main aims of this article are to explore this apparent
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29 incongruence between BI and SI and to ask: can a version of BI be fruitfully integrated into a
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31 broader SI strategy? We advance the argument that BI and SI are *not* fundamentally
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33 incompatible. Indeed, they may share a number of substantial points of agreement, and may
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35 even reinforce one another in certain respects according to a logic of institutional
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37 complementarity. In a nutshell, we argue that implicit claims that the BI and SI agendas are
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39 necessarily oppositional rely on certain ways of understanding each scenario – when other
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41 understandings are equally valid – as well as overlooking their overlapping and mutually-
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43 reinforcing principles, goals, and policy logics.
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48 The article is structured as follows. In section 2, we briefly outline the historical context and
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50 key conceptual features of the SI paradigm. We employ Hemerijck's (2015) framework –
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52 distinguishing between “buffer”, “stock” and “flow” functions, and acknowledging the crucial
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54 notions of institutional complementarities and cumulative life-course synergies – which we
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56 find to be both parsimonious and sufficiently faithful to the intentions of most SI scholars. We
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58 also clarify the mid- to long-term objectives of the SI agenda. In Section 3, we then outline the
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3 *prima facie* view that BI and SI are incompatible, and highlight the positions of advocates that
4 support this view. Next, in section 4, we claim that this seeming incompatibility between BI
5 and SI is in fact partly assisted by a mischaracterisation of BI as implying a neo-liberal assault
6 on existing welfare provisions. We stress the importance of considering a more attractive and
7 realistic BI scenario, which takes the form of a ‘partial’ cash guarantee.
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15 In Section 5, we go further than suggesting that the two visions for welfare reform are not
16 necessarily incompatible: we argue that they might be complementary, in the sense of
17 containing mutually-reinforcing elements according to a logic of institutional
18 complementarity. We elaborate on these possible complementarities between BI and the
19 various functions of SI, considering buffers, stocks, and flows in turn. Our claim is that a partial
20 form of BI could enhance the SI’s buffer function, as well as complement some aspects of the
21 stock and flow functions, and that the effectiveness of a partial BI itself would greatly benefit
22 from being incorporated into the SI policy mix. Drawing our arguments together, in the
23 concluding section we consider how such mutual reinforcement may enhance the political
24 feasibility of both scenarios.
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39 **2. Social investment: defining features and key objectives**

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41 The SI agenda emerged as an attempt to tread a path between old-style passive compensatory
42 welfare policies and neoliberal retrenchment. This perspective first emerged in academic
43 circles with the publication of *The Third Way*, by Anthony Giddens (1998). In Giddens’ view,
44 SI is aimed at investing in “human resources” at the service of economic growth. “Welfare
45 expenditure should (...) be switched as far as possible towards *human capital investment*.
46 Benefits systems should be reformed where they induce moral hazard, and a more *active risk-*
47 *taking* attitude encouraged, wherever possible through incentives, but where necessary by legal
48 obligations” (1998: 122, our emphasis).
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3 In this way, SI may “reduce the starkness” of the policy trilemma (between employment
4 creation, equality, and budgetary restraint) raised by the transition to the service economy
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6 (Wren, 2017: 97) and the emergence of “new social risks” (Bonoli, 2005). The foundation of
7
8 the SI paradigm is that these risks have increased until it is now necessary to move towards “a
9
10 new welfare state”. Along with Giddens, Gøsta Esping-Andersen actively contributed to the
11
12 increasing visibility of SI. In *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies* (1999), he
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14 tackled many of the topics to be at the core of later SI publications. During the Belgian
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16 presidency of the Council of the EU in 2000, Franck Vandebroucke (then a Minister for Social
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18 Affairs in Belgium) commissioned a report on the “New European Welfare Architecture”, that
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20 was subsequently revised and published as a collective volume edited by Esping-Andersen
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22 under the title *Why We Need a New Welfare State* (Esping-Andersen, 2002).
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29 This book made the connection between SI on the one hand, and the EU Lisbon strategy (2000)
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31 on the other. Since the publication of this collective volume, the SI paradigm has been widely
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33 discussed in the comparative welfare state literature as well as in political arenas, at national
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35 and, above all, EU level – under the influence of a true SI epistemic community. In 2013, the
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37 European Commission officially launched its own “Social Investment Package”, and in 2017
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39 the new “European Pillar of Social Rights” implicitly referred to many of its key aspects. In its
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41 2019 annual review on *Employment and Social Developments in Europe*, the Commission once
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43 again explicitly endorsed it, devoting an entire chapter to SI policies, and presenting them as
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45 central to the EU social model (European Commission, 2019: 123-169). Besides, the paradigm
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47 continues to be carefully scrutinized in academic publications (e.g. Cronert and Palme 2019;
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49 Garritzmann and Schwander, 2021; Garritzmann et al., 2022; Plavgo and Hemerijck, 2021).
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54 Although SI potentially traverses the education, childcare, labour market, and social security
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56 policy spheres, hence relying on a complex policy mix, there is general agreement in this fast-
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58 growing and diverse literature on the idea that SI welfare states must fulfil three complementary
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3 and interrelated functions: “(1) raising the quality of the ‘stock’ of human capital and
4 capabilities over the life course; (2) easing the ‘flow’ of contemporary labour-market and life-
5 course transitions; and (3) maintaining strong minimum-income universal safety nets as
6 income protection and economic stabilization ‘buffers’ in ageing societies” (Hemerijck, 2017:
7 19). Crucially, these “stock”, “flow”, and “buffer” defining functions are subject to cumulative
8 and conjunctive causation. That is, effective SI policies have ‘knock-on’ effects for individuals
9 later on in life, by building up their skills and resilience to shocks (*cumulative life-course*
10 *synergies*); and they reinforce one another in important ways (*institutional*
11 *complementarities*).¹

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24 According to SI advocates, by doing so social protection will “prepare rather than repair”
25 (Morel et al., 2012a: 12). The old-style welfare state was mostly based on *ex-post* corrections,
26 through social insurance and residual social assistance (*repair*), whereas the new welfare state
27 should be *ex-ante* oriented. Although “social investment is no substitute for social protection”
28 (Hemerijck, 2012: 49), this contrast between “repairing” and “preparing” is therefore truly
29 central to the SI paradigm: “The overarching social investment imperative is to prepare
30 individuals, families, and societies to pre-empt various risks rather than simply to repair
31 damage after risks produce genuine individual and social costs” (Hemerijck, 2013: 137).
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¹ The nature of the complementarities between buffer, stock, and flow are summarized by Dräbing and Nelson (2017).

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3 states and the market, and reaffirm the productive function of social policy. While this first
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5 objective is grounded in considerations of economic efficiency – and tends to be
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7 overemphasised by SI advocates – the second has its roots in political theory, and is no less
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9 important. In short, it implies that the SI policy mix will become the central pillar of a fair
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11 society, one in which all individuals – those who are disproportionately exposed to new social
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13 risks in particular – should get the material means to pursue their own conception of the good
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15 life. In other words, SI aims at contributing to an emancipatory agenda following the liberal-
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17 egalitarian tradition of John Rawls and Amartya Sen (Hemerijck, 2017: 21; Hemerijck and
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19 Plavgo, 2021: 317).

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24 Undoubtedly, putting these abstract ideas into practice involves a number of tensions and trade-
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26 offs, as the interpretation of the precise policy mix implied by the three SI functions and the
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28 twofold objective leaves room for ambiguity.² For instance, there may be contradictions
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30 between the buffer and flow functions, under circumstances that welfare payments generate
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32 financial disincentives to work and thus exacerbate welfare dependency. Furthermore, to the
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34 extent that behavioural conditionality mitigates against welfare dependency by ensuring that
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36 individuals cannot remain idle by choice, further contradictions emerge. In relation to the
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38 “stock” function, patchy coverage and punitive sanctions may damage household income
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40 security, thus jeopardising human capital development in impoverished households. In relation
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42 to the “flow” function, families’ optimal work-life arrangements, and individuals’ capacities
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44 to find suitable, well paid jobs may be undermined in favour of workfare and requirements to
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46 accept *any* job, backed by the threat of sanction. In other words, the SI activation agenda could
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48 plausibly undermine the goals of SI to facilitate (beneficial) labour market and life-course
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50 transitions in practice.
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59 ² This is recognized by several prominent authors within the SI paradigm: “the notion of SI comes along with a
60 high degree of ambiguity. This ambiguity relates to the concept of SI itself, its normative implications, and the empirical effects of SI policies on inequality” (Busemeyer et al., 2018: 807).

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3 Although complementarities within the policy mix can possibly lead to “double or even triple
4 dividend” (Hemerijck, 2017: 24), this means that SI policies can also be subject to institutional
5 in-complementarity and exhibit reduced effectiveness with regard to SI’s own long-term goals.
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7 This becomes especially clear, as the above examples show and as we further discuss below,
8 when concrete implementation is biased towards workfare-like reforms aimed at stressing the
9 individual responsibility of beneficiaries. If one keeps the twin goals of economic efficiency
10 and social justice in mind, it is our contention that BI could ameliorate these evident in-
11 complementarities *within* the SI paradigm, while pushing the SI agenda away from a paternalist
12 policy mix towards a more human-capital focused, social-democratic one (Ahn and Kim, 2015;
13 Bonoli, 2009).³ Before fleshing out these arguments in greater detail, we first elaborate on the
14 basis for the apparent mainstream position that BI and SI are mutually exclusive alternatives.
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29 **3. Basic income and social investment: the *prima facie* case for incompatibility**

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31 Following the standard definition of Van Parijs and Vanderborght (2017: 4), BI is “a regular
32 income paid in cash to every individual member of a society, irrespective of income from other
33 sources and with no strings attached”. These definitional attributes show that if implemented a
34 BI would represent a departure from existing means-tested minimum income schemes, which
35 are often seen as the centrepiece of the SI policy mix as far as its buffer function is concerned.
36 It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that there is an often implicit, and sometimes explicit
37 assumption among SI advocates that the SI policy mix necessarily excludes all forms of BI.
38 The obligation-freeness of BI, in particular, seems to be at odds with the promotion of paid
39 employment and upskilling by SI supporters.
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52 **3.1. Activation, individual responsibility, and freedom from obligation to work**

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59 ³ For a detailed discussion of these two versions, which we consider here as representing two opposite ends of a
60 continuum of possible SI policy mixes, see Cronert and Palme (2019).

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3 In its current mainstream interpretation, SI has a strong focus on labour market activation and
4 personal responsibility, which is legitimised by the state providing adequate employment
5 opportunities and capacitating services for vulnerable groups. In practical terms, labour market
6 engagement is encouraged via incentive-reinforcing buffers, including time-limited
7 entitlements and the attachment of behavioural conditions (and possibly punitive sanctions) to
8 social security payments.
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SI advocates are keen to emphasise the fact that SI should not be seen as a substitute for social protection, and that effective buffers are required as complements to the stock and flow functions: “financial resources are necessary to support a comprehensive job search and encourage people to take the risks involved in inter alia starting a business or earning another degree (...) Without buffering, health declines, households slip into poverty, workers accept jobs below their skill level, and investments are not made due to a necessarily myopic focus on day-to-day living” (Dräbing and Nelson, 2017: 129). According to Vandenbroucke, “the principle of individual responsibility requires a context of full solidarity with those who have become victims through circumstances beyond their control” (2002: xiv). SI advocates are nevertheless highly critical of the potential downsides of ‘passive’ social protection: “One cannot turn a blind eye to the negative, unintended, and perverse side effects of generous social security benefits of long duration: that is, undermining work incentives and raising the tax burden” (Hemerijck, 2017: 25).

In this way, the buffer function is seen to clash with the flow function under certain circumstances, and social policies should therefore be designed in order to reduce this tension. Hence, social insurance payments such as contribution-based unemployment benefits should be limited in time. Time-unbound, means-tested social assistance benefits are to be seen as a ‘necessary evil’ – for those failing to qualify for social insurance benefits, and those who have

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3 exhausted their time-bound entitlements, especially in the context of increasingly dualized
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5 labour markets.
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8 How, then, to prevent these recipients becoming dependent? According to Gazier et al. (2014:
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10 166), the new welfare architecture needs to include “a series of obligations and sanctions in
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12 order to avoid that the passive or parasitic behaviour of some individuals would threaten the
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14 viability of the common life of all”.⁴ This is in line with the responsibility-sensitiveness of the
15
16 SI paradigm, and one of the major motives behind the scepticism of SI advocates towards BI.
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18 The bundle of policy measures associated with SI approach thus usually includes compulsory
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20 job search requirements at the bare minimum, and ranges towards more *workfarist* measures
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22 such as compulsory job placements in the most paternalist interpretations of the paradigm.
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27 In contrast, BI is strictly obligation-free, granted without any form of work requirement. If it
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29 takes the form of a substantial monthly payment, i.e. one that is sufficient to cover one’s basic
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31 needs if ones lives alone, it can be conceptualised as providing a permanent exit option from
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33 the labour market (Gorz, 1997; Widerquist, 2013). It has featured heavily in utopian narratives
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35 about a “world without work” (Srnicsek and Williams, 2015). The possibility that BI could
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37 enable idleness has been defended on philosophical grounds (Van Parijs, 1991) and post-
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39 productivist advocates such as Kallis (2011) see BI as a crucial component of a ‘degrowth’
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41 policy mix that includes a progressive reduction in working hours. The idea of providing
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43 everyone with such entitlement to a substantial cash transfer without any duty to reciprocate
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45 seems to be at odds with the goal of self-reliance which underlies the plea for activation within
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47 the SI framework.
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52 **3.2. Cash and services, paternalism, and ‘real freedom’**

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60 ⁴ Our translation.

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3 According to the SI paradigm, the corollary of the expectation of personal responsibility is that
4 the state has a responsibility to prepare individuals for effective labour market participation
5 through a capacitating welfare state. This generates another apparent source of incongruence
6 between BI and the ideal-typical SI policy mix: while BI advocates reinforce the importance
7 of *cash* transfers, the SI paradigm stresses the value of *capacitating* services aimed at human
8 capital formation – improving the general quality of the labour force and raising earning
9 potential at the micro level. SI supporters do not deny the necessity of a cash safety net, but for
10 reasons of responsibility-sensitiveness such net must necessarily be conditional and time-
11 bound. By contrast, enabling services (esp. childcare facilities, vocational training, lifelong
12 learning, and job search coaching) should play a truly central role in the new welfare
13 architecture, turning the goal of raising the stock of human capital into reality, and easing the
14 flow of life-course transitions.

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17 Although they make clear that services are not intended to be a substitute for cash transfers, SI
18 adherents claim that faced with budgetary constraints, welfare states have to choose between
19 expanding services or introducing a substantial BI, such are the fiscal costs of each. Thus, the
20 opposition to BI by SI advocates appears at least partly driven by considerations of practical
21 issues of affordability and budgetary trade-offs. For example, Bruno Palier (2019: 129) argues
22 that “rather than seeking to guarantee a minimum income for all [i.e. a BI], it would be better
23 to ensure that any person in need should receive a guaranteed [means-tested] minimum income,
24 without having to pay this to the entire population”. Similarly, Hemerijck (2000: 150) rejects
25 BI partly on the basis that “modest, less costly, more economically feasible and politically
26 viable” policy options are available.

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29 However, disagreements on matters of principle are also apparent. Some SI advocates view BI
30 as promoting ‘individualistic’ ideals of consumer choice (Palier, 2016, 2019), whereas new
31 forms of protection require a “new social contract” (Gazier et al., 2014: 192), “a collective

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3 consciousness of a community with a destiny” (Palier, 2019: 131). Indeed, BI has seen perhaps
4 its most robust philosophical defence from the ‘real libertarian’ perspective, which holds that
5 cash transfers are more efficient and fairer than transfers in kind (Van Parijs, 1995: 41-42). In
6 such perspective, cash provides greater flexibility with respect to people’s choices, “thus
7 allowing individual preferences to prevail among the various options available even with a
8 modest budget” (Van Parijs and Vanderborght, 2017: 13). This statement hints at concerns that
9 the SI practical implementation agenda leads to ‘Matthew effects’, and due to differences in
10 individuals’ capabilities to translate services such as education and childcare into higher
11 incomes, that they are less equitable than cash benefits (Cantillon and Van Lancker, 2013).
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24 The idea that individuals are capable of making rational decisions in their own self-interest,
25 contrasts with the perspective that they are frequently incapable of doing so due to myopia or
26 imperfect information, justifying ‘paternalistic’ mandatory social policies. SI advocates accept
27 that individuals are unequally endowed with marketable assets, but the fact leads them to a
28 different conclusion: that marginalised groups *especially* must be cajoled into labour market
29 engagement for their own benefit. The logic holds that work is about more than income, and
30 provides vital psychological advantages, as well as benefits in terms of social equality and
31 cohesion.
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43 According to Palier (2016: 5), the renewed interest in BI takes us “away from a much-needed
44 reflection on the services that our social protection system should guarantee. The analysis of
45 the new social risks facing individuals shows that they need, as a matter of priority, universal
46 social services that are genuinely accessible to all”.⁵ In his view the BI supporters’ plea for an
47 unconditional cash buffer relies on a liberal, indeed, neoliberal conception of the free
48 individual. Palier defends a more paternalistic approach of compulsion into capacitating
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59 ⁵ Our translation. For an overview of the case for “universal basic services”, sometimes explicitly framed as an
60 alternative to BI, see e.g. Coote and Percy (2020), and Gough (2019).

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3 services by referring to the origins of social insurance schemes: “When you are poor, you have
4 a poor capacity to anticipate, and you have poor capacity to save money. [Receiving a cash
5 grant] is not a true individual freedom (...) And that is why Bismarck (...) made social
6 insurance compulsory. You may call that paternalist, against the will of people, but it is also in
7 line with [empirical] observation” (Palier 2017).
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15 **4. Does social investment necessarily preclude a basic income? Refuting the prima facie** 16 **case** 17 18

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20 Given the above, it seems that BI contrasts sharply with the ideal characteristics of SI as it
21 would be paid in cash, time-unbound and unconnected to behavioural conditions. But are these
22 apparent differences really so critical? The in-complementarity between BI and SI is in fact
23 partly assisted by a mischaracterisation of BI. The few SI advocates addressing it head-on tend
24 to focus on a very specific version: that of a substantial unconditional benefit that would replace
25 most existing social programmes, and allow individuals to withdraw from the labour market
26 entirely. They see such move as unsustainable, and conceive it as a *de facto* neoliberal assault
27 on the welfare state. For example, Palier argues that “it seems highly unlikely that the resources
28 devoted to the main social protection expenditures (pensions, health) can be used to finance a
29 basic income (...), unless at the same time pensions and/or health care are privatised. This
30 would be quite a paradox: a strong socialisation of income in the service of a privatisation of
31 social protection!” (Palier, 2016: 74).⁶ And in his forceful plea in favour of “universal basic
32 services”, Gough argues that “by focusing wholly on individual income, UBI [universal basic
33 income] would threaten public provision of collective consumption, which of course is why
34 many on the libertarian right support it” (Gough, 2019: 541).
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⁶ Our translation.

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3 This ‘straw man’ may indeed be incompatible with any conceivable SI policy mix. Such
4 expansive and generous version of BI may indeed run into a charge that it discourages work,
5 becoming unsustainable, or crowds out other forms of social expenditure. However, a full-
6 fledged BI financed by massive cuts in welfare spending is only one of the many BI scenarios
7 that have been designed and circulated.⁷ In fact, most BI advocates stress the fact that such
8 ‘full’ BI – i.e. one whose amount would be sufficient to live on if one lives alone – is not an
9 option worth selecting as a short-term scenario in the current context of developed welfare
10 states. Van Parijs and Vanderborght, for instance, advocate a more modest version of it, “a
11 partial basic income – that is, one that makes no claim to being sufficient to live on” (2017:
12 165-169). Typically, the amount of such a partial BI would be lower than the poverty threshold
13 in a given country, for instance €480 per month in the scheme designed for France by Marc de
14 Basquiat (de Basquiat and Koenig, 2017), or £71 per week in the proposal of Reed and Lansley
15 (2016) for the United Kingdom. This is also the case of the “Youth Basic Income” paid every
16 three months to all 24-year-old in the Gyeonggi province of South Korea since 2019. With an
17 amount (in local currency) equivalent to KRW250,000 (approximately €180) per quarter, it
18 does not cover the living expenses (Seong Yoo, 2020: 21).

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41 As far as activation, work, and activity are concerned, while by definition BI cannot be
42 conditional on labour market activity, such a partial BI would arguably be compatible with
43 other welfare provisions that are. Indeed, advocates of a partial scheme recommend it as a
44 universal income floor ‘layer’, supplemented by social insurance or social assistance targeted
45 at those with additional costs and needs (Haagh, 2019; Van Parijs and Vanderborght, 2017).
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There is nothing to suggest that these supplementary layers cannot be related to behavioural
conditions. Furthermore, BI advocates such as Haagh (2019) are explicit about the need for

⁷ See De Wispelaere and Stirton (2004) and Martinelli (2017) for analysis of the dimensions along which BI schemes may diverge. See e.g. the contributions to Van Parijs (2018) for progressive visions of BI.

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3 sustainable funding of capacitating services, just as SI advocates are clear on the necessity of
4 generous cash buffers. In other words, there should be no presumption that labour market
5 disengagement is the goal or indeed the likely impact of the introduction of all forms of BI.
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7 Core elements of the ‘activation’ agenda – such as (voluntary) skills development programmes
8 and public employment services – are entirely consistent with partial BI schemes.
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11 Quite ironically, precisely due to this focus on labour market activation and its responsibility-
12 sensitiveness, SI has also been characterized by some of its critics as being “neo-liberal”.
13
14 Laruffa, for example, argues that “the social investment discourse (...) while presenting itself
15 as a departure from neoliberalism, may actually reinforce some of its central ideological
16 elements” (2018: 690), and that SI “remains committed to neo-liberal capitalism” (2018: 703).
17
18 Although, as we have seen, the ideal-typical SI strategy is justified in reference to the twin
19 goals of fairness and efficiency, in practice the SI policy mix adopted by social policymakers
20 in Europe and elsewhere is sometimes seen as ineffective in terms of poverty reduction
21 (Cantillon and Van Lancker, 2011; Van Lancker and Ghysels, 2012; Van Vliet and Wang,
22 2015). The buffer function is jeopardised by the SI focus on activation, which may translate
23 into benefit sanctions or the fact that benefit rates are kept modest in order to preserve work
24 incentives. The SI mix has also been criticized for its tendency to prioritize public spending
25 aimed at working families, giving rise to important ‘Matthew effects’ (Bonoli and Liechti,
26 2018; Cantillon and Van Lancker, 2013; Parolin and Van Lancker, 2021).
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30 In the next section, we claim that the incorporation of a partial BI into the SI policy mix would
31 offer a decisive opportunity to rescue the SI agenda from these harsh criticisms, by pushing it
32 in the direction of a more social-democratic version, without affecting its overall architecture
33 and goals.
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5. Enhancing complementarities between buffer, stock and flow functions via basic income

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3 In what follows, we explore some of the reasons why a partial BI scheme may help promote
4 the three core functions of SI, without generating large or unpredictable disincentive effects as
5 would be the case of a ‘full’ BI. Thus it is our contention that, following a logic of institutional
6 complementarity in which “one set of institutions is said to be complementary to another when
7 its presence raises the returns available from the other” (Hall and Gingerich, 2009: 450), the
8 introduction of a partial BI would contribute to increasing the returns of the SI policy mix, and
9 the effectiveness of BI itself would greatly benefit from the building blocks of the SI welfare
10 state. This mutual reinforcement is obviously not an end in itself, but would serve the twin
11 goals of economic efficiency and social justice which are central to the SI agenda.
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23 **5.1. Basic income as an incentive-reinforcing buffer**

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26 The elimination (at least, the reduction) of poverty, unemployment, and bureaucracy traps will
27 enhance the material incentives of claimants to enter employment or self-employment, if
28 existing provisions were at least partially replaced by a universal BI. Admittedly, the provision
29 of a ‘full’ BI might countervail against this in two ways: by providing a more viable exit option
30 from the labour market, especially for those with weak attachment to the latter; and, if financed
31 through payroll taxes, by reducing the effective wage rate. But these effects would be minimal
32 in the case of a partial BI financed by progressive taxation. In the round, such a partial BI might
33 paradoxically complement the flow function more effectively than the targeted and
34 contributory buffers which SI proponents tend to favour. True, the extent to which BI would
35 reduce or enhance incentives for labour market participation is a complex issue, depending
36 upon the interplay of income and substitution effects, the counterfactual welfare system with
37 which its effects are compared, and policy design features, including the level of payment and
38 the manner of interaction with the existing systems provisions (Martinelli, 2017: 54-55).
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56 To date, the limited evidence collected through the latest social experiments does not show that
57 the provision of a modest obligation-free cash guarantee translates into a massive weakening
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3 of the attachment to employment. The experiment conducted in Finland between January 2017
4 and December 2018 consisted in paying a monthly grant of 560€ – i.e. less than half of
5 Finland’s poverty threshold in 2017⁸ – to 2.000 low-income recipients. As would be the case
6 with a true partial BI, the benefit was not only individual and obligation-free, but could also be
7 topped-up with income from work. Contrary to a true partial BI, however, it was paid to the
8 long-term unemployed only. In their final report, the Finnish researchers show that on average
9 individuals in the experimental group (i.e. the long-term jobseekers receiving a basic income)
10 were not less prone to take part-time or full-time jobs than those in the control group, despite
11 the fact that the latter became the subject of new activation measures in early 2018. Moreover,
12 due to positive effects on their overall well-being, basic income recipients “were significantly
13 more confident in their re-employment opportunity than the control group” (Ylikännö and
14 Kangas, 2021: 66).

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31 In the Netherlands, several local authorities launched similar but smaller-scale experiments in
32 2018 (Groot et al., 2019). In the city of Utrecht, for instance, three treatment groups of welfare
33 recipients were compared to a control group whose participants were submitted to the (rather
34 strict) obligations of existing social assistance schemes. Participants in the “self-activation”
35 group were exempted from any duty to actively search for work, while those in the “work pays”
36 group could keep a fraction of their benefit even in the case of additional earnings. In the “extra
37 support for activation” group, participants were submitted to the same conditions as those in
38 the control group, but enjoyed much closer support from dedicated job coaches. One of the
39 most surprising results of the Utrecht experiment was that participants in the “self-activation”
40 group did not work less than the others. In fact, this group had the highest proportion of
41 recipients who were able to secure a permanent job on their own during the experiment, while
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59 ⁸ According to Eurostat, Finland’s poverty threshold (60% of median equivalised income) was €1,200 per month
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3 participants in the other groups generally remained in precarious employment (Verlaet et al.,
4
5 2020).

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8 Indeed, evidence on the role of compulsory conditionality in promoting labour market
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10 participation is far from clear cut, further calling into question this SI ‘article of faith’.
11
12 Theoretically, it is possible that compulsory activities crowd out more meaningful training and
13
14 skills development activities (Immervoll and Pearson, 2009) and the distrust inherent in the
15
16 sanctions regime may dissuade claimants from exerting more than minimal efforts to fulfil
17
18 obligations (Verlaet and De Bruijn, 2016). A further objection to stringent and punitive labour
19
20 market conditions is that they jeopardise job match quality – and therefore the longevity of any
21
22 resulting employment, if sanctions preclude the refusal of even unsuitable jobs (Rueda, 2015:
23
24 296). In this way, some of the practical manifestations of the SI paradigm undermine its wider
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26 goals in relation to the promotion of high-quality, well-paid jobs.
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31 32 **5.2. Basic income as serving a wider flow function**

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34 BI could thus be seen as an incentive-reinforcing buffer that promotes the flow function by
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36 easing the transition between inactivity and activity, not only because it is topped-up with
37
38 earnings, but also due to its autonomy-enhancing character. But the flow function in a social-
39
40 democratic SI is about more than promoting short-term labour market transitions: more
41
42 broadly, it connects to life course transitions (e.g. Plavgo and Hemerijck, 2021). The challenge
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44 is to maintain and increase economic output – including through the increase in female labour
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46 force participation – while facilitating reproduction in order to mitigate against growing
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48 dependency ratios and ensuring the quantity and quality of future human capital stocks.
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53 There is a long-standing debate between feminist scholars about BI’s gender egalitarian
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55 credentials. Critics counter that it could act in a similar way to a ‘house wife’s wage’,
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57 entrenching gendered inequalities as many women, already marginalised as part-time second-
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3 earners, would withdraw further from the labour market in favour of caring responsibilities
4 (e.g. Bergmann, 2008; Silvera 2018). But proponents suggest that BI, even in its partial version,
5
6 could subsidise childcare for working parents, facilitate maternal employment, and help
7
8 redistribute (‘reshuffle’) caring responsibilities. Perhaps most importantly, BI’s individual
9
10 character would lead to increased autonomy for women, mitigating intra-household power
11
12 imbalances, the feminisation of poverty, and financial abuse (e.g. McKay 2001; Schulz 2017;
13
14 Zelleke 2008). Because women tend to be disadvantaged in the labour market and do a
15
16 disproportionate amount of part-time and low-paid work, BI could strengthen their bargaining
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18 position relative to men, while at the same time enabling men to reduce their hours of paid
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20 work and shoulder a greater proportion of unpaid care work (McLean, 2016).
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27 Whether BI’s feminist proponents or critics are correct is largely an empirical matter, beyond
28
29 the scope of this article. However, what is key to our claim is that the extent to which a partial
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31 BI could enhance the functions of SI in relation to maternal employment, work-life balance,
32
33 and gender equality more generally – or whether it would act as a house wife’s wage, thus
34
35 entrenching inequality – will crucially depend on whether high quality complementary services
36
37 were available. As was put by Robeyns (2001: 103), “to do real and full justice to women, a
38
39 basic income should be supplemented with other social policy measures (...)”. Among these,
40
41 Elgarte (2008: 6) rightly stresses the importance of “enabling measures”, such as “affordable
42
43 and easily available high-quality care services and adaptable school schedules”, that are often
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45 to be found in the SI literature itself.
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50 **5.3. Basic income as contributing to the improvement of human capital**

51
52 In relation to its compatibility with the stock function, BI has been conceptualised as a flexible
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54 “sabbatical grant” (Offe and de Deken, 2000) supporting life-long learning and development –
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56 as “venture capital for people” in Bregman’s (2017) analysis. For in principle a BI does not
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58 only ease transitions between productive occupations (in an immediate sense); it also facilitates
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3 transitions between training and employment opportunities. A partial BI, in particular, while
4 being too modest to offer a permanent exit option from the labour market, could perfectly serve
5 as a flexible training subsidy. As is the case with its impact on gender equality, it will however
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8 fully play its role in promoting such transitions provided that high quality (educational)
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11 services are made widely available.
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15 The Mincome experiment conducted in Manitoba (Canada) in the 1970s – which remained
16
17 understudied until the 2010s – gave some valuable evidence that the provision of an
18
19 unconditional guaranteed income (in that case under the form of a negative income tax) may
20
21 generate a modest decline in working hours for some sub-groups (Calnitsky and Latner, 2017).
22
23 But in most cases the slight decrease in waged employment did actually translate into increased
24
25 engagement in socially useful activities, including education and self-employment, not into a
26
27 shift to more ‘leisure’ understood as personal recreation activities (Calnitsky et al., 2019).
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29 Impressive positive schooling effects were also observed in some of the U.S. negative income
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31 tax experiments conducted in the same period (Levine et al., 2005; Mallar 1977).
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36 A social-democratic version of SI should also adopt an extensive understanding of human
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38 capital, which stresses the importance of physical and psychological health (Drabing and
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40 Nelson, 2017: 129). Looking again at the Mincome experiment, Forget (2011) documents
41
42 important health effects, including reduced hospitalisations, and improved mental health
43
44 outcomes. In their assessment of the Finnish BI experiment, Simanainen and Tuulio-
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46 Henriksson (2021: 84) conclude that “the treatment group receiving basic income reported
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48 higher life satisfaction, better health, less mental distress and depression, and stronger cognitive
49
50 capabilities regarding memory, ability to learn new things, and ability to concentrate than the
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52 control group not receiving a basic income”. In their in-depth review of “basic income-like
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54 interventions”, which includes results from the Canadian and U.S. experiments, Gibson et al.
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56 (2020: 165) argue along the same lines, stressing the fact that unconditional income security
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3 gives rise to modest but significant health benefits: “little evidence exists of large reductions
4 in employment, and some evidence suggests positive effects on some other outcomes,
5 including health outcomes”.
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10 **6. Conclusion: Mutual reinforcement, deflecting criticism, and strategic feasibility**

11
12 SI does not exclude BI as a matter of principle, and indeed, if incorporated in a well-designed
13 policy mix, a modest unconditional income floor could help promote the buffer, flow and stock
14 functions of a social-democratic SI welfare state. A non-withdrawable partial BI permits
15 individuals to retain payments as they increase their earned income. Such BI could thus fit
16 comfortably with SI’s focus on labour market activation by ‘making work pay’, and in some
17 respects, could fit more comfortably than the traditional forms of welfare provision favoured
18 by SI advocates. Furthermore, BI could provide a more secure basis on which to build human
19 capital, optimise labour market engagement, and devote time to socially-valuable
20 ‘reproductive’ activities.
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34 While complementarities between buffer, stock, and flow functions would be enhanced by the
35 provision of a BI, we also claim that the effectiveness of BI would be enhanced by the provision
36 of the capacitating services included in the SI policy package. This is because the availability
37 of high quality services would encourage individuals to invest, rather than merely consume,
38 their BI. Rather than ‘paying off’ disadvantaged individuals with a passive transfer,
39 capacitating services would transform BI into a truly emancipatory proposal, in line with the
40 liberal-egalitarian objective of SI advocates.
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50 An important caveat to these claims regarding complementarity between BI and SI arises in
51 the context of budgetary constraints. As a practical matter, it might not be feasible to support
52 both agendas simultaneously, even in the case of a partial BI: all forms of expenditure are in
53 competition in the context of limited fiscal resources; in this sense, (increased spending on)
54 cash and (increased spending on) services are substitutes. It is less that the two scenarios are in
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3 conflict *per se* but that it may be more affordable and / or politically expedient to prioritise one
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5 or the other. We cannot discount such a possibility; indeed our arguments regarding the fruitful
6
7 combination of a partial BI and a social-democratic version of SI presuppose that consensus
8
9 on the need for higher social expenditure funded via tax rises may gradually emerge in response
10
11 to ongoing challenges to the legitimacy of advanced capitalism and traditional welfare state
12
13 settlements. In this perspective, we follow SI supporters when they stress that this consensus
14
15 will be easier to reach when such expenditures are framed as *investments*, hence worth the
16
17 (short-term) extra-cost.
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22 More generally, we would like to suggest that integration of the two ‘alternatives’ will
23
24 contribute not only to greater policy effectiveness, but also to enhanced political strategic
25
26 feasibility. It does so by pushing advocates of BI and SI to adopt more coherent and effective
27
28 positions on some key issues, forcing them to reject unfavourable variants of their preferred
29
30 approach, and thus stave off some of the most profound critiques directed at them.
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34 The integration of a partial BI could contribute to overcoming some of the main criticisms of
35
36 the SI agenda, i.e. the fact that in practical terms implementation has veered towards a
37
38 workfarist rather than a social-democratic version, that it tends to neglect the buffer function,
39
40 and that it gives rise to important Matthew effects.⁹ The provision of a modest BI would fix
41
42 gaps caused by punitive activation policies, and would help promote engagement of
43
44 marginalised people in capacitating services. For example, a small unconditional income might
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46 permit individuals to afford the discretionary travel and equipment purchases required to
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48 participate fully in education or training. It could incentivise labour market participation by
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50 reducing withdrawal rates, strengthen the bargaining positions of disadvantaged workers, and
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58 ⁹ Although it is our contention that a properly designed social-democratic SI policy mix will greatly benefit from
59 the integration of a partial BI, it goes without saying that additional measures may be required to reach that goal.
60 In particular, we agree with Cronert and Palme (2019: 215) that the key role of “wage-bargaining institutions and
adequate minimum wages” has been “largely neglected in the previous literature on social investments.”

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3 facilitate efficiency-enhancing ‘reshuffle effects’, allowing BI advocates to capitalise on the
4
5 preoccupations of SI supporters. Against the most workfarist interpretations of the SI paradigm,
6
7 BI does not aim at promoting employment at any cost. Indeed, a modest or temporary decline
8
9 in employment is not a bad thing *as such* even from the point of view of SI: it may mean that
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11 non-work activities take the form of training or unpaid care, which both have a positive effect
12
13 on human capital; it becomes easier for workers to temporarily leave the labour market when
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15 their jobs do not match their ambitions. Acceptance of an unconditional income floor as part
16
17 of a broader SI approach thus forces proponents to reject workfarist and regressive policy
18
19 mixes.
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24 Integration into the SI framework could benefit BI advocates too. BI is seen as a radical and
25
26 unrealistic policy, tainted by two perceptions: that it is neoliberal, because it aims to replace
27
28 the welfare state; and it is unaffordable and unsustainable, because at high levels of payment it
29
30 is too expensive and provides a genuine exit option from paid work.
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34 Engagement with SI would require full-throated acknowledgment that BI is one pillar of social
35
36 protection alongside targeted assistance and contributory, time-bounded earnings-related
37
38 benefits, both of which have distinct functions that are not well-served by BI. It would also
39
40 require acknowledging the need for the expansion of capacitating services as a wider package
41
42 of measures alongside BI. It would constrain the cost of BI to more affordable proportions, by
43
44 favouring modest and partial variants of the policy. Studies have shown such schemes offer a
45
46 better compromise between fiscal and distributional goals than full schemes (Martinelli, 2020).
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48 The partial nature of the scheme and the simultaneous expansion of other social policy
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50 functions would clarify that this type of BI is not a replacement for the welfare state.
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55 Explicit integration within the SI framework may also rescue BI from the criticism that by
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57 disconnecting income from work it automatically undermines the primacy of labour.
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59 Supporting the expansion of voluntary active labour market policies such as job search services
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3 and training programmes, as well as targeted industrial and technology policies to maximise
4 employment opportunities, could help defend BI against charges that it tolerates idleness and
5 marginalisation for the most disadvantaged individuals. It would also assuage the fears of BI
6 critics that a relatively small BI could exacerbate the prevalence of low-paid and precarious
7 work via downward pressure on the reservation wage (Gazier et al., 2014: 98; Gray, 2017).
8
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10
11 Counter to the popular argument that BI's broad appeal is a political strength, we argue that
12 rejecting the more radical of the myriad forms BI could take is a crucial political strategic task
13 for BI proponents. The 'persistent division' of BI supporters (De Wispelaere, 2016) presents
14 political barriers since the movement may be tainted by the inclusion of right-wing
15 conservatives and more radical progressives. Coming down on a concrete position – that a
16 partial version alongside other social security and social services is the only feasible option –
17 may dampen some existing vocal support, but will probably enhance BI's appeal to the political
18 centre ground.
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